Kendra Kile

English 101 – Dr. Sherry

Commuting vs. Residential Students

Problem

Many senior students from around this area who are interested in going to Bloomsburg University face one difficult decision; should they commute or reside in a dorm? While both commuting and residing at Bloomsburg University play different roles in social life, education, and finance, it is important for all incoming freshman to have the most fitting decision for themselves as well as for what the future has in store. Personally I am faced with this problem as well, and I would like to find out more information of the pros and cons of each side of this decision process. The transition from high school to college is such a big step and it is so significant to start the process with open knowledge to help reach the most logical and reasonable choice. What are the major advantages and disadvantages of commuting or residing at Bloomsburg University and what will help me become successful both during and after college?

Background

Numerous studies have examined differences between students who live on campus and those that commute to college, with some studies suggesting that students who live on campus tend to have advantages over those who commute to campus (Peterson, 1975). As I was researching this topic, I came across many studies that discussed the significant differences between students involvement on campus, levels of stress, time spent working, academic performance, as well as major differences in cost. Peterson (1975) suggests that “residence hall dwellers are better off financially, educationally, and in other ways to begin with. Then, largely because of their greater involvement in various educational and developmental activities, they make significantly greater gains, particularly in nonacademic personal development” (p. 2). At a miz-sized Southwestern state university, demographic differences between 108 commuter students and 345 residential students were examined by Newbold, Mehta, and Forbus (2011). With this study, they were able to conclude that commuter students were much less active in on –campus activities than residential students. According to a research made my Kuh, Gonyea, and Palmer (2001), the results indicated that “residential students were more engaged in effective educational practices and – in all likelihood – were more likely benefitting more from their college experience” (p. 6) “…driving commuters really do have less contact with their teachers and do not take advantage of such opportunities as co-curricular activities, community service, study abroad, internships, and so forth” (p. 8). “It appears that further away a student lives from campus, the less likely a student is to take advantage of the educational resources of the school.” (p. 9). Within all of the ethnographic studies that I have looked in to, it is evident that commuter students do not get involved as often compared to residential students. They claim to want to get more involved, and feel more connected with the university community but can’t. I also found that many authors and researchers claim that commuter students are far more stressed. Barbara D. Davis (p. 74) as well claims that it is difficult for commuter students to connect to the campus. When one commutes, they have a tendency to get to class on time, and then leave as the class ends which creates the issue of not getting involved. The perception may be that commuter students do not want to get involved with class members, campus life or activities, but research indicates this is not true (Likins, 1991).

Method

To answer these questions, I interviewed two freshman students who were commuting to Bloomsburg University and two female students who were staying in a dorm (INtroduce). I decided to use the method of interviewing because it is best to hear other people’s honest opinions about this specific topic. I also used the method of observing the quad to determine what students do to/from class to help understand the social life of a student on campus.

Findings

(INsert)

Interview #1:

Two freshman female students commuting to Bloomsburg University

1. Why did you decide to commute to college?

1.I decided to commute to Bloomsburg because of how much money I am saving also because I like to study in a quiet environment. I also wanted to work at least 20 hours a week, so I thought it would just be a lot easier.

2.It saved my family and I a lot of money and I don’t live too far from campus.

2. Do you sometimes regret your decision?

1.No, not really. Sometimes I get upset though because I don't really get the whole "college experience". It defiantly keeps me out of trouble though.

2.Yes, I do. I liked the idea of saving money from the start but I think I’d rather get the full college experience. If I lived on campus, I know I would still have my family close and if I really needed something I could have easily just called my parents and they would have been here in just 10 minutes.

3. Do you think you get better grades versus if you were dorming?

1.Absolutely. I have a great work area set up in my room and there aren't many distractions.

2.When I’m at home at night trying to get homework done on a computer, I sometimes wish I could just walk to the library because I know I’d be a lot more successful. The only place I do homework in my house is on my bed… which is very distracting.

4. Do you think you have made just as many friends as you would've if you were dorming?

1.Honestly not really. I go to class and then leave, there really isn't much time to communicate with other people. If I stayed in the dorm I feel like there would have been a lot more time to make friends and do things with other people.

2.Definitely not. I talk to people in my class, but that’s it. If I was dorming I obviously would have made so many more friends.

5. If you could start over, would you still have decided to commute?

1.There's so many pros and cons, I would go either route. I like living at home, but I wish I could get the full college experience and become involved with campus activities. But if I was dorming, I wouldn't save as much money and I feel like my grades would not be as great.

2.NO!! I would have stayed on campus. Living at home is great and all but I think that would have been my first major step to becoming more responsible and I think I would have had made so many more friends. Definitely stay in a dorm.

Interview #2:

2 freshman female studenst staying in a dorm at Bloomsburg University who are from Bloomsburg

1. Why did you decide to dorm at Bloomsburg?

1.I just wanted to see what college was really like, I needed time away on my own.

2.I wanted to get the college experience

2. What do you really enjoy about your decision?

1.I really like that I am getting the full college experience. I am meeting so many new people, studying with a group often, sharing a room with my best friend,

and walking where ever I need to go. And I like that I don't need to rely on my parents for

everything now.

1.I’m getting better grades then I think I would if I was staying at home, I’m making so many new friends, and I’m getting the experience that every college student should get.

3. What do you dislike about your decision?

A. So far nothing. I'm so close to home so if I absolutely need something I can just go

there for it.

B. Nothing so far.

4. How are your study habits? Do you think you'd do better if you were commuting?

1.I have decent grades, but I'm not really sure if I'd get even better grades or not if I commuted. I have a big family at home so sometimes it's hard to concentrate but I also get very distracted here with friends. So I feel like either way my grades would be around the same.

2.Good, I always go to the library. If I were at home, I don’t think I’d study as much.

5. If you could start over, would you still have decided to dorm?

1.Absolutely. At first it was in consideration to save a lot of money but I am very happy with my decision. If I get home sick I'm not at all too far away but I'm in good enough distance to have my own space and grow up a little bit.

2.Yes, I love it. Like I said, I think every student needs the whole college experience.

Based on my interviews, it is evident that all 4 students seemed to want to dorm simply because of the “college experience”(INterpret). While some think saving money is the best route, some disagree and think the experience is more important. I can conclude that although there are many pros and cons to both dorming and commuting, it is important to take all aspects in to consideration. As I was interviewing on student who decided to commute, it seemed as though she kind of regretted her decision simply because she was not making as many friends and she wasn’t as involved on campus as she had hoped. Making friends seems difficult if you are commuting, and it is very important to have friends to at least get you part of the college experience. As I was researching, I noticed that many articles were explaining more pros to dorming and far more cons to commuting, and interviewing these four students really gave that idea as well.

Along with interviewing, I also used the method of observing. After one of my classes one day, I decided to stay on campus to observe what students did before and after class. I observed the quad for a half hour, taking notice of what people were doing. Upon my time sitting on a bench, I counted 13 students listening to music, 10 students on the phone talking, 14 student’s texting, and a very large number of students in groups talking to one another. I noticed that of the students talking in groups, it was more common of two or three people in a group. Based on my observation, I can conclude that many students were quite sociable. It seems that many students walking were walking with people that they knew from campus, or even were possibly walking with their roommates to/from class or elsewhere. This differs from commuter students, because it is unlikely that a commuter student would walk on campus, heading to get food or going to the library because they easily could just go home and avoid walking alone or eating alone on some days. Commuter students, in essence, have no “consecutiveness” to the campus. Therefore, the full benefits, opportunities and collegiality of having the “college” experience are lessened (Davis 74).

Conclusion

Based on my ethnographic data, college culture while residing on campus as well as at home are two very different experiences. There seems so be far more advantages to dorming at a University then commuting, simply because of the “college experience” including education. If you are living campus, you are more than likely to use the resources that are available to you, such as the library, professors, friends, and study groups. Those who commute get to class on time, then head home immediately after leaving no time to connect to the University. The data that I have collected confirms what Peterson (1975) and Kuh, Gonyea, and Palmer (2001) have noticed. If you live on campus, you have far more chance of making friends, getting involved, and taking advantage of the resources you need to get a better grade.